

A SERMON

PREACHED IN WESTMINSTER ABBEY,

ON ST. MATTHIAS' DAY, 1859,

AT

THE CONSECRATION

OF THE

FIRST BISHOP OF BRITISH COLUMBIA.

BY ARCHIBALD CAMPBELL,

LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

LONDON :

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1859.

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TO
MISS BURDETT COUTTS,

BY WHOM

THE BISHOPRIC OF BRITISH COLUMBIA WAS ENDOWED,

This Sermon is Dedicated

BY HER SINCERE FRIEND,

A. C. LONDON.

A S E R M O N.

ACTS I. 26.

And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias.

ST. MATTHIAS the apostle, on whose day we are met, was then selected for his apostleship by lot. The principle of choosing by lot was very different in the democracy of Athens and in the theocracy of the inspired and miraculously supported Church of the days of the apostles. The democratic principle of choosing office-bearers by lot was, that all who were capable of appointment were equal in claim; that they were all alike entitled to have the chance of appointment; and that the fairest plan for giving none an undue advantage, was to cast all the names into the urn and submit the selection to blind chance. But the spirit in which the Church of the Apostles had recourse to lot is marked in this morning's Epistle in the verses which

come before the text. The disciples were gathered together: they were reminded of the deep importance of the occasion on which they met: out of the number of those who had companied with the eleven all the time that the Lord Jesus had gone in and out among them—beginning from His first initiation into His ministry till the day when He was taken up to heaven—two were carefully selected; and then, that man's judgment might not be trusted further, the last selection was referred to God: They prayed, and said: "*Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two Thou hast chosen.*"

The qualifications of an apostle, as described in this passage, were different from those of a ruler of the Church in our days. To have been present at all the Lord did and said during the years of His earthly sojourn, and to be a witness of His resurrection—this qualification, and the miraculous duties of the office, have passed: the ordinary duties of oversight and government, with the ministry of the Word and sacraments, remain, and will remain while the world lasts. Who can exaggerate the importance of these duties, or the qualifications required for their full discharge through God's grace?

It is a goodly sight to see the Church of God putting forth its strength; sending its chief ministers, with all the arrangements of its fully

developed system, to take possession for Christ of the distant lands, which, learning to reverence the British name, we trust, for many temporal blessings, receive from Britain as the greatest of all blessings the inheritance of the Gospel of the Lord, and the opportunity of worshipping Him in His own appointed ordinances. And if there ever were a case which called for our Church's fully ordered system, we have it in that land to which we send our brother forth to-day. We send him forth, that, striving to touch and rouse men's hearts by the preaching of the Gospel, he may not leave them without guidance when aroused, but that exerting himself in every way, God helping him—by orderly government—by establishing the relations of a duly subordinated ministry—by giving to all arrangements of the Gospel their settled form, venerable as coming down from the days of the apostles—he may, by God's grace, cherish a Christian love of law and order, and a reverence for the old things of Christ's Church in the midst of a society which, it may be feared, has within it the elements of dissolution, simply because, from its peculiar circumstances, it can produce from within itself no reverence for those thoughts and associations, to which the Bishop's office especially witnesses. It is indeed a goodly and great work to found a bishopric in such a colony. Let us thank God heartily

that the desire, and means have been given to found it. The awful trust of wealth cannot be used better than when it is thus laid out to produce interest in spreading Christian civilization where unchristianised society would be a hell. We have good ground to believe that the work now undertaken of founding this bishopric is of God.

And if the Bishop's office is thus so much needed, how great the amount of simple, self-denying zeal, and wise discretion, requisite for its due discharge. Our prayers should be earnest that our brother's soul may be blessed. We look upon him as called to a work peculiarly great and difficult.

"Do you trust that you are inwardly moved by the Holy Ghost to take upon you this office?"¹ Thus the Church speaks to each candidate for admission into the ministry. And if the first step, so each that follows it—binding with awful responsibilities—opening up fresh means of influence—investing with higher powers—shall not each step be taken only when we can gather that it is the will of God, whispered by the Holy Ghost, that we should take it? A solemn and appalling thought when realized in plainness and sincerity—apart from all the conventionalities of religious or professional phraseology—that we are not justified in seeking any advancement as Christ's ministers, except so far

¹ Ordering of Deacons.

forth as we are prepared to answer to God, who knows the heart, that we have good reason to believe that the proposed change in our life, and the willingness to embark on it, come only from Himself. With all those accessories of wealth and many worldly advantages, which the prosperity of the Church has wound around its higher dignities at home, how dangerous an opening for self-deceit! Truly it is different when, as to-day, we are met to see one raised to the sacred office in a bishopric, which is indeed like our own bishoprics at home, in that it will have its full share of apostolic labours and difficulties, but unlike them will be left in all respects to apostolic simplicity in its outward worldly circumstances. It may well be taken for granted that a man engages in such an office in the spirit of self-sacrifice. The rending of home-ties; a life-long dwelling amongst rough men, in such a state of society as is likely to spring up when a barbarous land has the offscourings of the civilized world suddenly poured into it; the having to deal, in the attempt to spread the Gospel, neither with our own people, such as we have them at home (knowing from long experience their worst and best qualities), nor yet with some simple savage tribe, nor some ancient nation, the habits and feelings of which, however degraded, may at least be learned from what observation and history tell us of their institutions, and their

past career,—but the having to deal, in our attempts to spread the Gospel, with a confluence of men from all nations—most of whom have cast themselves adrift from all the softening associations of country, of home, of law, of religion; to have it as your life's business to mould such men into the forms of the Christian society, and bring their rough hearts to reflect the image of the Lord Jesus Christ: truly, there are so few alluring features in this prospect that there seems little room, in the breast of him before whom it is opening, for any feelings but those of self-sacrifice. Yet it is well for all of us, even to-day, reverently and distinctly to call to mind, that if we are to expect that the work undertaken to-day is to be blessed—the thoughts which have led to it, the purpose of founding this bishopric, and the call of him we send to it, must all proceed from God the Holy Ghost. We do not, as the Apostles did, cast the names of those who seem fitted for the office into the urn, and prayerfully leave it to God, the searcher of hearts, to say, by controlling the lots, which name He has chosen. But, if the efforts of our Church to Christianise the world are to be assured of God's blessing, the whole matter—the wishes and efforts of the members of the Church generally, to put forward the claims of those they honour—the actual selection of those on whom God has laid the weighty responsibility of choice—the accept-

ance of the office by him who is chosen, and the solemn work of consecration when the choice is made—all ought to be marked and hallowed by that reverent, faithful, praying spirit which referred the selection of Matthias directly to the Lord who knows all hearts.

My friends, would that in our common daily life we were more accustomed to see God manifested—to refer to Him, and faithfully to wait upon Him! Then should we be more certain to place ourselves entirely in His hands, and feel His manifested presence, and rejoice to submit our wills and desires to Him in those more solemn matters, which we cannot but recognise as demanding His especial cognizance, since they directly and powerfully affect the eternal interests of so many souls for which Christ died.

“ They gave forth the lots ; and the lot fell upon Matthias.” “ The lot is cast into the lap,” says the wise man, *“ but the whole disposing thereof is of the Lord.”*¹ It is a comfort which every religious mind knows when any emergency of our life seems imminent—a comfort doubtless felt by him whom we are to-day assembled to set apart for his great office—that there is One who controls us in all things which affect us ; that, as it is true that without His cognizance not a sparrow falls to the ground, so all the little incidents that have given its bias to our life past—all the relations

¹ Proverbs xvi. 33.

into which we have been thrown—all the influences which have been brought to bear upon us—all the helps we have had in rising to positions of usefulness, and all the checks too which have at times thwarted our cherished desires—have been subject to His absolute controlling will; that as a loving Father He has tended us from our earliest childhood; and when we have grieved Him by the sad neglect and sinfulness of past years, He has still never forsaken us, but, loving us in the Lord Jesus Christ even when we showed ourselves to be His wayward children, has caused all things to work together, if by any means our characters might be so trained and disciplined that we might be fitted for the very duties and the very position for which He of His goodness destined us. Our life may have seemed to flow on at random, acquaintances may seem to have been formed by chance which have given a turn and complexion to our whole life; but Christians know that they are not subjected to chance, that they are dealt with even in the minutest matters by the Lord who loves their souls.

Of St. Matthias, I suppose it may be said, we know almost nothing. As he, with other apostles barely named, and then apparently forgotten in the history, is a remarkable example how God may have a great and real work for men to do, and yet may push themselves as it were altogether into the background, making what they perform

not the less real because it is thus marked as His work, and not theirs, and is difficult or impossible to distinguish in its details from the great whole of those doings of God, of which it is but an insignificant part—as thus St. Matthias is no sooner named as an apostle than he is lost sight of—so we cannot tell, as to his earlier days, what sort of a home cherished him in boyhood; who taught him, or how he was taught; what discipline he had, of a sickly or a healthy, a happy or unhappy youth. We do not know amid what sort of scenes in town or country his mind developed, nor what was the accidental circumstance, as it would be called, which led him first to listen to the words of the Lord Jesus, and to give himself to His company. But be sure that the gracious Father who called him to the apostleship, who put it into the hearts of those who gathered together for the choice of Judas' successor, to select his name with that of Barsabas, and then so disposed the lots that he finally was chosen—be sure, I say, that this gracious Father had all through the events of his earlier days been shaping his course and arranging every circumstance of his being, if haply his soul might be saved from the dangerous temptations which must have beset him as a child of Adam, and moulded to that form in which it would best answer to the responsibilities of that great work to which in time he was to be called.

For us Christians this is no commonplace reliance on the great truth of natural religion, that God controls the universe, and, infinite in His condescension to small details as in His boundless grasp of the greatness which is illimitable, deals not only with worlds and empires, but with their inhabitants one by one. Rather it is the conviction that in Christ Jesus we Christians are brought so near to the Father of our spirits that what others acknowledge coldly of God's controlling power as a doctrine of philosophy, we can realize as a living fact, knowing and feeling, as well as acknowledging, that we are and ever have been in our Father's hands. If a man be a real disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ, it is wonderful how this thought grows in intensity within him; what calmness it gives him in all changes; how it reconciles him to be forgotten and thought nothing of if God deems that best for him; and how also it makes him look forward hopefully if a post of difficult and high responsibility, and many irksome duties, has not been grasped at by his own self-will, but is distinctly assigned to him by the providential arrangements of his Father's controlling power. Then he feels, He who has called me has been preparing me; He who has kept me hitherto will not leave me now, if I strive humbly and earnestly to be ever near Him in the Lord Jesus Christ. It is, as we have hinted, to awaken this feeling and to deepen it,

that our Church so earnestly presses on the consciences of its clergy to make sure that they are called of God to their office according to the will of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, innumerable instances press upon us to show that God thus prepares His servants for whatever work He has for them. The boy Joseph, during those hours when he lay hopeless in the pit—how were his ambitious dreamings of fancy chastened, when it seemed thus all over with him, and he felt that he was certain to die early and unhonoured. Doubtless during those sad solitary hours of darkness his heart was drawn, as it never had been before, to feel after and lean upon that unseen Friend, whom he never forgot afterwards amid the most dangerous seductions of temptation. In the prison, too, is it not certain that God was giving him the discipline of adversity, that he might bear himself the better in that strange reverse of sudden affluence and power and royal favour, which in like circumstances has proved ruinous to very many souls?

Again, the Hebrew youth Moses, nurtured at court, contrary to all that might have been expected for him in the humble lot to which he was born—instructed in all the wisdom of the Egyptians—who can doubt that, while God's Spirit prevented him, in that seductive position amidst their masters, from forgetting the enslaved

people who were of his own blood, those outward advantages of his acquired position were all used and controlled to fit him better for rescuing his fellow-slaves from their miserable thralldom, and building them up to be a great people, while he became, through the truths he was commissioned to announce then, not only the Jews', but the world's lawgiver? Examples are endless: David, the shepherd-boy, musing in the solitude of the sheepwalk on thoughts which were to become the theme of Psalms fit to be sung by him amid assembled worshippers, when God raised him to be the wise and powerful shepherd of his people; Daniel, the abstemious, God-fearing captive youth, preparing to be the truth-loving, fearless, uncorrupted minister of a despotic court, upholding God and His truth with unshaken fidelity, while reigns began and ended, and dynasties tottered, and the plots of envious evil men were ever on the watch to entrap and ruin him. So in New Testament times—remember St. Peter's watchful labours at the net, fitting him to become equally watchful and laborious as a fisher of men, his early frowardness mellowing into steady zeal, losing, through the very discipline of its falls and disgrace, all in it which was wavering and unreliable, while it retained its eagerness and fire. Or think of St. Paul—his training at the feet of the great Pharisee—the deep insight he gained into his country's

theology—even what he learned of heathen poets and philosophers—who knows not how God sent them all to fit him better for his conflict with the prejudices of Jews and Greeks? And who can fail to trace also how the early vehemence of the bigoted upholder of Judaism was moulded by God Himself, as well through the great catastrophe of his life that befell him on the journey to Damascus, as through after years of struggle and suffering, into that overpowering zeal of ardent Christian faith to which, speaking humanly, we owe, more than to any other cause, the conversion of Europe and the ultimate downfall of Paganism? Doubtless, if we knew the secret history of God's great servants of every age, we should see their heavenly Father using every event and circumstance of their lives to fit them for the great work to which He destined them. Man proposes, but God disposes. And God in Christ, caring for His Church with all a Father's yearning love, watches and guides each circumstance of our being, and moulds the hearts of those who yield themselves to be led by Him, that they may be fitted to do His work.

And now, my brother, going forth to do God's work in a distant land, under very peculiar difficulties, think, for thy encouragement, of God's dealings with thee in past times. The lessons even of boyhood and early youth—nay, of thy earliest childhood—they will not be lost

in the sphere to which God has called thee. The trials and joys of past years, they have all been ordered to make thee fit to do God's work now. Thy confirmation—thy first communion—that turning of thy heart, whether it were gradual or whether it were sudden, which led thee to realize thy nearness to God and the things unseen, far more than thou couldst have done in thoughtless days—the solemn impressions of thy first ordination—the cares and difficulties of thy first pastoral charge—the death-beds, standing by which, yet inexperienced, thou wast called in Christ's name to cheer or warn—thy early teachings, as much of thyself as of the children committed to thee in the ministrations of the Sunday-school—thy growing opportunities of usefulness in a wider sphere as years advanced and ministerial experience deepened—all thy felt acquaintance in past times with thine own weakness and miserable failures, and thy grateful acknowledgment of being empowered to do some good in thy Master's name amongst those whose souls were committed to Thee—consider now that thy gracious and loving Father has been overruling all these things to fit thee for this thy life's work. It is a work which needs all training and all help; but in which thy heart has no cause to fail thee, if thou dost enter on it in a faithful, prayerful spirit, depending on the Lord Jesus Christ.

No doubt the difficulties which God sets before us are found, when we manfully grapple with them, to be less than they at first appear. No doubt, in a new colony of gold-seekers, where society cannot indeed be said to be disorganized, but simply because it has never been formed, and to which bold, reckless adventurers have gathered from every land, there must be a fearful mass of utter godlessness; but, no doubt, also, in this age, when our old countries are straitened from the multitude of their inhabitants, and high-spirited young men cannot find occupation for their energies at home, many seek this new field beyond the ocean, who are driven forth by no restlessness of bad principles, but who desire to find or establish the same Christian home in their new to which they were accustomed in their old country. And doubtless he who is thus appointed to be the chief religious teacher and guide of such a new colony will find many helps to aid him in the midst of surrounding discouragements, from young men trained in Christian principles, who have no wish to forget their early associations, and who must much depend on his guidance and kindly sympathy, if they are to be kept right or raised to true Christian feeling at a distance from the friends, who have watched over them in boyhood. And as, after all, human nature is much alike wherever we go—and God the Holy

Ghost is ever at hand to use hours of sickness and despondency for whispering, even in the rudest and hardest hearts, that there are things beyond the world of which sickness and death cannot rob us—treasures more precious than the finest gold, laid up for the faithful in Christ's presence; and as the trusting freshness of childhood, and the helplessness of old age, are found in all communities, and offer precious moments in which, even in a very wild state of society, the things unseen may be better valued than, alas, they are likely to be amid the incessant strife of the occupations of men's middle strength,—surely in any great aggregate of human beings, the minister of Christ's Gospel may feel quite confident that abundant opportunities will be offered him for pressing the truths of hell and heaven and Christ's salvation home to many hearts and consciences, with all the aids of which God the Holy Ghost avails Himself, from the varying circumstances of our common humanity. He who has human beings to deal with, wherever they are and whatever they are, finds the same wants and miseries, and has to apply the same balm of Christ's Gospel—a soothing cure for all wounds.

The one thing, my friends, needful for all of us, as ministers of Christ, to remember, wherever we are placed, and whatever be our difficulties, is this—to be faithful to Him whose name and

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commission we bear ; while we boldly rebuke vice for Him, and are an example in our own persons of a life guided by His rules and given up to His service, to speak to sinners' souls His simple truth, which has a wonderful, most searching power. Call to mind what, in our past experience, are those truths which have most, by God's grace, won their way into rude hearts which had not thought of Christ before. Speak to them as St. Paul spake. No words go so straight to the conscience as those which tell of the love of the Lord Jesus, and the exceeding misery of sin. Somehow these simple Gospel doctrines find an echo in the rudest hearts, which we might in vain attempt to waken by all the threatenings of the Law, without the gentle invitations of the Gospel. The preaching of the Gospel of Christ, at home and abroad, is powerful to the rousing of the conscience. Use this instrument first faithfully, and then we may turn with great effect to the accessories of a regularly formed Church system, when we have first convinced men that they and their children have souls to be saved, which, by God's grace, the regulations of the Church will edify and guard.

God grant all of us, at home and abroad, to have a daily deepening feeling of our responsibilities, a better understanding of the way in which God, through life's discipline, has been

preparing each of us in our sphere and degree to do some good to the souls around us ; and as we love and acknowledge the Gospel of Christ daily more in our own hearts, to be able to press its truths better on the hearts and consciences of others.

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